

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY		3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE			
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION  U.S. Army War College	6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)  Root Hall, Building 122 Carlisle, PA 17013-5050		7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
		TASK NO.	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) An HISTORICAL STUDY: GYPSIES OF THE BATTLEFIELD, THE CIDG PROGRAM IN VIETNAM AND ITS EVOLUTIONARY IMPACT			
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Booth, Lance E., LTC(P), USA			
13a. TYPE OF REPORT Study Project	13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 1 February 1992	15. PAGE COUNT 49
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION			
17. COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)  During the period from 1964 through 1971, the longest counterinsurgency/coalition warfare mission in the history of the United States Army was conducted by the 5th Special Forces Group, Airborne. This program was successful in preventing communist control of large portions of uncommitted indigenous ethnic groups and mobilizing these groups into the struggle for the survival of their country. This contribution equated to a 4 divisional force level which was cost effective and illustrated an economy of force model for future conflicts. Equally important were the lessons learned from the CIDG Program which paid dividends during Coalition Warfare as executed during Desert Shield/Desert Storm by the United States Army Special Forces. This case study serves to document and analyze this long forgotten but strategically important achievement by the American Army during the Viet Nam War.			
20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL COL JOHN N. SLOAN		22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (717) 245-3881	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL AWCAC

UNCLASSIFIED

USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

GYPSIES OF THE BATTLEFIELD  
THE CIDG PROGRAM IN VIETNAM AND ITS EVOLUTIONARY IMPACT  
AN HISTORICAL STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: LANCE E. BOOTH, LTC (P), USA  
TITLE: AN HISTORICAL STUDY: GYPSIES OF THE BATTLEFIELD THE  
CIDG PROGRAM IN VIETNAM AND ITS EVOLUTIONARY IMPACT,  
FORMAT: Individual Study Project  
DATE: 1 February 1992 PAGES: 49  
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

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## INTRODUCTION

The Civilian Irregular Defense Group program (CIDG) began as an American initiative to prevent the populace of South Viet Nam from being subjected to terrorism and to deny enemy control. It was initially defensive and counter insurgent by nature and was transformed into an Army offensive operation executed by the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) from 1964 through 1971 as a fully integrated supporting strategy of the Military Assistance Command, Viet Nam. The 5th SFGA utilizing the CIDG was the only Army unit to consistently fight combat operations in all corps areas simultaneously in the history of the war. The CIDG program was successful in preventing communist control of large portions of uncommitted indigenous ethnic groups and mobilizing these groups into the struggle for survival of their country. Tragically, the Special Forces contribution and the sacrifices of the CIDG to this noble struggle were forgotten by history in the "Peace with Honor" decades until now.

This paper serves to document and analyze this long forgotten but strategically important counterinsurgency, coalition warfare program. Senior leaders should reflect upon the contribution of the Special Forces' success with the CIDG program and understand its evolutionary impact on coalition warfare as demonstrated in the Persian Gulf War as well as on future conflict strategy.

Army doctrine defines counterinsurgency as "Those military, paramilitary, political, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency." <sup>1</sup> Army Foreign Internal Defense doctrine is defined as the participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government to free and protect society from subversion, lawlessness and insurgency. The Special Forces mission in this inter-agency activity is to organize, train, advise, and assist host nation (HN) military and para military forces." <sup>2</sup> Specifically, Special Forces participate in the following types of operations:

- training assistance
- advisory assistance
- intelligence operations
- psychological operations
- civil military operations
- populace and resources control
- tactical operations <sup>3</sup>

With the 20-20 hindsight of 1992, this is exactly what the Special Forces did with the CIDG in support of the Military Assistance Command, Viet Nam (MACV) Combined Campaign Strategy for the war.

The Special Forces fully understood that in the insurgency or low intensity conflict portion of the spectrum, populace control was a center of gravity. That fact remains so today and will endure in the future. It could be said that if there is no populace problem, there is no insurgency problem. US Army doctrine states:

"to defeat an insurgency, the host nation government must isolate the insurgents from the population on which they depend for manpower, supplies, funds, and intelligence. When denied access to the population, the insurgents must do one of the following:

- Stand and fight for control over the population, subject themselves to the superior combat power of the established government and its allies.
- Retreat to their remote base areas, where isolation from the population diminishes their influence and reduces the relevance of the insurgency to the legitimate needs of the population.
- Revert to an earlier phase of insurgency and resume low-level subversive activities until conditions become more favorable."

The above reads like an official history of the success of the CIDG and the demise of the Viet Cong (VC). This is because our doctrine was validated during the Viet Nam War. Today, the US Army and its Special Forces accept this doctrine fully, but the remainder of the American military are blissfully ignorant of the CIDG program and its contribution to the present doctrine for Low Intensity Conflict (LIC). This contribution has been astutely crafted into current Army doctrine based on the hard lessons learned. In fact, the roots of the recent victory in

Desert Storm were derived from the visionary analysis of the operational continuum and how to integrate Army SOF into the combined arms team.

Taking action to meet the challenges of future conflicts the Chief of Staff of the US Army established three types of forces: Heavy, Light and Special Operation Forces (SOF). Yet, until the Persian Gulf War, few in the military truly appreciated or understood SOF (which includes Special Forces in its force structure). Even fewer comprehended how SOF fit in the current Airland Battle doctrine or its role/contribution to the Viet Nam War. To better understand the principles of current Army doctrine and to set history straight, it is mandatory to go back to the beginnings in South Viet Nam. Reflect as we proceed in this study of the CIDG that Low Intensity Conflict rather than total warfare has consistently been on the menu for the combatant CINC's since World War II. Our first shot at coalition warfare in Viet Nam is grossly misunderstood as historians miss the point about this insurgency. Historian Col (ret) Harry Summers is an example as he maintains: "We failed in Viet Nam because we attempted to do too much. Instead of concentrating our efforts on repelling external aggression as we had done in Korea we also took upon ourselves the task of nation building." <sup>5</sup> While Summers' point may fit the World War II and the Korean War situations, it ignored the realities that the enemy as well as the population we were trying to secure were centers of gravity. Considering the current nature of American military operations in



Low Intensity Conflict: Grenada, Panama, Saudi Arabia (Desert Shield), Turkey/Iraq, the United States has been in the nation building (now called Internal Defense and Development) business since World War II. One of the Army SOF units specifically designed to do this Internal Defense and Development mission is the Special Forces. The basic Special Forces element which executes this at the cutting edge is the Special Forces A Detachment (SFODA) which is "designed to organize, equip, train, advise or direct, and support indigenous military or paramilitary forces in unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense operations."<sup>6</sup> The detachment has two enlisted specialists in each of the five Special Forces functional areas: weapons, engineer, medical, communications, and operations and intelligence.<sup>7</sup> These functional areas allow the SFODA to conduct a dynamic force multiplication role throughout the operational continuum as was illustrated by its performance in Viet Nam War and in the Persian Gulf War.

#### VIET NAM, THE EARLY YEARS

In the beginning, long before American military solutions were fully introduced into the Viet Nam War, our most successful approach to that type of insurgency problem was the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) controlled, United States Army Special Forces executed Citizen Irregular Defense Group program. It started in 1961 during a period of low hostilities in South Viet

Nam. This was a period when the Viet Cong (VC) were avoiding major military actions and targeting the populace in the rural areas. The people were more interested in being left alone than anything else but the enemy was making inroads that had to be countered.<sup>8</sup> The CIA evaluated the situation as such:

"the greatest portion of the peasant population was committed ideologically to neither side...it was equally obvious that effective propaganda, revolutionary organization, and terror tactics were bringing thousands of peasants under Viet Cong control;...CIA originators, mindful perhaps of failures in Laos with the flatland Lao and of success with the Meo, looked to the highlands of South Vietnam. There, in relative isolation, lived some 500,000 primitive tribesmen spread over nearly 75 percent of the country's land area, while the remaining 14 million Vietnamese lived mostly jammed into the fertile deltas and coastal areas."<sup>9</sup>

A counterinsurgency strategy was needed. The CIA designed the Citizen Irregular Defense Groups to defend, emphasis, defend remote villages and eliminate rural dependence on distant Vietnamese forces for security. In effect, the CIA strategy was to train the people and arm them sufficiently to defend their own areas. This paramilitary program sought to establish secure villages by the inhabitants themselves and then expand out into neighboring areas. This was often referred to as the "oil spot" doctrine. The purpose was both defensive and political in nature, never offensive. The CIA view was that the Special Forces: "understood this perfectly when they worked under CIA direction and implemented the concept with imagination and sensitivity."<sup>10</sup>

Just exactly what strategy was the Special Forces executing? The first element and test bed for this village defense strategy was half of an A detachment, Cpt Shackelton and five Special Forces Non Commissioned Officers in February 1962. This was the Buon Enao project in Dar Lac Province, of the remote Central Vietnamese Highlands, and involved primitive Montagnard villages. The detachment trained and provided the locals with the means to protect themselves in their own village areas. There was no pay involved, only training. These villages could then deny VC exploitation of their locality long enough for locally recruited, better trained and paid citizen strike forces to come to their rescue.<sup>11</sup> This model of organization was a population denial program of the first order. Shackelton relates:

"As more and more villages were trained and armed, the Viet Cong lost more and more support. The accessibility and freedom of movement they once enjoyed no longer went unnoticed nor unreported. The Viet Cong were now forced to revert to repressive measures: seizing rice, conscripting men, and taking hostages in their desperation to survive. But even with terror, the guerrillas most potent weapon and a standard part of his strategy, they lost popular support. They were soon without communal sanctuaries for regrouping after military defeats. The Viet Cong now had to devote a majority of his effort merely to survive.....this program released Vietnamese regular army units to conduct offensive operations in force against the Viet Cong. Otherwise, these forces would find themselves confined to garrison cities, entirely encircled by a hostile countryside. ...the protection of the Montagnards was no longer a military responsibility. The village defenders were responsible for their own protection and security."<sup>12</sup>

In eight months, by August 1962, under CIA control, the Special Forces with this program had secured over 200 villages, half the 120,000 populace of the province, and 4000 square kilometers of land (equivalent to the size of the state of Connecticut) from enemy control. It must be emphasized that this was an area not under South Vietnamese Government control at the inception of the Citizen Irregular Defense Program.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, at the investment of six personnel, and eight months commitment, the return was a motivated, self reliant populace allied against the Viet Cong. This was strong currency for a developmental strategy to export throughout Viet Nam in order to deny population exploitation by the insurgent Viet Cong.

#### OPERATION SWITCHBACK

The question that begs to be asked is why did this CIA strategy not work. The answer is that it did work, but in true American fashion, we reorganized and the strategy fell victim to this change. After the Bay of Pigs humiliation, the CIA was determined to lack the resources to run large scale paramilitary operations and that when the point was reached where these covert operations became large scale, the Pentagon would take the lead, establish a well defined chain of command and the CIA would participate in a supporting role where its expertise was needed.<sup>14</sup> By mid 1963, approximately 18 months after Buon Enao started, the Citizen Irregular Defense Group program expansion

consisted of 30 camps in a countrywide program to extend the South Vietnamese government control. The Special Forces found themselves involved with the religious and indigenous minorities that were untapped manpower resources of the central government.<sup>15</sup> This was largely due to alienation over centuries but the CIDG program bridged this racial/religious obstacle and denied this vulnerability to the Viet Cong. What the situation had become was far beyond a backwater covert operation. The program was now a national program and exit the CIA.

The United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam assumed operational responsibility under Operation Switchback and the expansion became cloudy. It is at this point, that William Colby relates the course charted for the CIDG went afoul:

"But within a few months of the November effective date of Switchback, the strategy was changed...The program of arming the safer communities in "oil spot" fashion was abandoned, and the weapons we had distributed there were picked up from groups we had trained to defend themselves. The full time "strike force" units we had organized to bring reinforcement to embattled communities were bodily moved to isolated fortress bases along the Cambodian and Laotian borders, from which they were directed to conduct aggressive patrols, ambushes, and attacks in the jungles and mountains against infiltrators from North Viet Nam. This was certainly a military mission, but it left the Communist strategy of the peoples's war in the villages essentially unopposed. We decided to fight our kind of war rather than the kind the enemy was fighting."<sup>16</sup>

The change of the Civilian (changed from CIA version of "citizen") Irregular Defense Group concept to the conventional MACV leadership saw great changes in the original purpose of the program.<sup>17</sup> It must be made clear, it was not the Special Forces who either advocated nor pushed for this change of mission. The Special Forces could conduct counterinsurgency with the CIDG or could fight a conventional war with the CIDG. The point here is the decision to move the CIDG into the MACV attrition war strategy was made at the highest levels without a true appreciation for the optimal use of the Special Forces CIDG potential as a counterinsurgency/pacification strategy tool. The new MACV CIDG program was expanded rapidly with negative factors incorporated into this expansion. The village concept was shelved. The indigenous groups were being organized into paid mercenaries with the object of offensive operations under Special Forces leadership. The locations had also changed. Now camps were being built away from the localities of the native indigenous soldiers.<sup>18</sup> This change was not for the better as far as denying the population to the Viet Cong insurgency. Additionally, the incorporation of Vietnamese Special Forces into the program to command and American Special Forces to only advise was implemented.<sup>19</sup> While a coalition approach would seem to be beneficial, after all, it was the Vietnamese war, the truth was the Vietnamese Special Forces were in command in name only. This trend continued throughout the program up until 1967 because the Vietnamese were simply not prepared to take on this leadership

role. Why was this? The truth was the Vietnamese had not been fully trained by the American Special Forces and they were reluctant initially to involve themselves in what they thought was a pure American initiative. The other portion of the truth was that the MACV change to the original CIDG concept forced a "take charge" approach by the American Special Forces.<sup>20</sup> The CIDG and the Vietnamese government were literally swept off their feet by the MACV launch in 1963 into an American dominated strategy where the Americans would take the war to the enemy and let the Vietnamese consolidate and control the countryside while also reconstructing an armed forces and normal government.

Switchback placed MACV squarely in charge by 30 June, 1963. During this transition, 11,000 strike forces were formed, 800 villages and 40,000 village defenders (Strikers) trained. The strike forces started to create a life of their own. The Buon Enoa experience took too long, speed became a factor and the strategy evolved to get the strike forces into a border surveillance mission as well as into securing operational areas.<sup>21</sup> The involvement of Special Forces had by now swelled from a few detachments to a provisional Special Forces group and "By June 1963, the CIDG camps in II Corps had completed the training of enough strike force troops to enable US Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, to shift emphasis from training to operations against the Viet Cong."<sup>22</sup> When the CIDG program swung away from the village emphasis, the substitution of American Special Forces for Vietnamese Special Forces (VNSF)

began in earnest. The American Special Forces began to command and control the strike forces and remarkably the VNSF allowed this to occur: "Vietnamese Special Forces troops officers and noncommissioned officers were not as well trained as their US counterparts, and were, furthermore, often unwilling to carry out offensive operations with the civilian irregulars. From the point of view of the Vietnamese Special Forces and their government, the CIDG program was an American project."<sup>11</sup> It just went without saying, the Americans were paying, supplying the CIDG and tasking the missions for the force. The Vietnamese saved face by passively taking a backseat approach. If there is a black eye to the American Special Forces, it is this period before 1967, when in the interest of speed, we took charge of what was rightfully a Vietnamese operation instead of training the Vietnamese Special Forces and then executing the CIDG as a fully coalition program. As stated, it was not until 1967 that the VNSF finally evolved and were capable of taking charge. On a positive note, this evolution was far ahead of other MACV coalition initiatives or the later Nixon Vietnamization mandate. Had the credibility of the Vietnamese Army been fully considered in the MACV strategy, the American Special Forces should have never been put in the position of taking over the CIDG at all. In essence, Vietnamese Special Forces leadership and an earlier coalition CIDG effort were casualties of the American impatience and near term planning.



## WAR OF ATTRITION

From 1965 on, US Army conventional ground operations was the MACV solution to counterinsurgency and paramilitary village defense forces did not fit the picture. The US Army introduced conventional forces into Viet Nam to conduct the big sweeps called search and destroy operations to pacify the countryside. The problem was that this style of pacification only lasted as long as these American forces remained in the area. Once departed, the VC returned and all gains were lost.<sup>24</sup> The end result of this strategy was that between the years of 1964-69, 20% of the population of South Viet Nam became refugees due to this strategy (this figure does not count the roughly 1 million or 6% of the population temporarily displaced due to the period before and after Tet 68).<sup>25</sup> Added into this vacuum of a population in constant turmoil, was the decline of local intelligence. When the Special Forces left the village defense program, there ended the local intelligence of the VC provided by the CIDG. This CIDG intelligence effort was now directed after intelligence on enemy infiltration and order of battle which benefitted the search and destroy/attrition strategy but left the war for the people unchecked.<sup>26</sup>

As stated previously, the mission changed for Special Forces and the CIDG almost immediately after MACV took charge. Priority was given to placement of the CIDG along the remote borders of South Viet Nam. From 1963 on, this trend continued. Their

mission became border surveillance as specifically directed by the MACV Combined Campaign Plans of 1964 through 1969. The CIDG now conducted patrols to screen the border areas and had 25 camps with 11,250 strikers performing this mission by mid 1964. These remote sites or camps required hiring irregulars and displacement of same with families to these sites. The strike forces became organized under tables of organization and equipment and began offensive operations. This period saw the increased employment of the CIDG in support or jointly working with other free world military forces.<sup>27</sup>

By 1965, the border mission had been going for about two years. The CIDG found themselves "far from populated areas, against an enemy who, for the most part was operating and receiving sustenance from within South Vietnam."<sup>28</sup> Did the CIDG stop enemy infiltration? Absolutely not. What was wrong? Basically the strategy of employing the CIDG to an economy of force role screening South Viet Nam's borders was bypassed by the escalating war of attrition as North Viet Nam flooded units into South Viet Nam. The North Vietnamese invasion was far beyond the capability of the CIDG to stem. Were the CIDG incompetent or just ill employed? The truth was that by 1968, during the height of the attrition war period, "some twenty two ARVN and American division equivalents were unable to achieve any greater success monitoring the same remote border regions."<sup>29</sup> In sum, the CIDG were no less competent than regular divisions in what was an impossible task. It is fair to say that the economy of force

role that the CIDG had been performing had saved about twenty two division equivalents from border duties up until 1968 and was vindication of the MACV strategy. Harsher examination could conclude that the CIDG could have contributed more under the village defense concept of the CIA and thereby eliminated the communist infrastructures that facilitated the surprise communist TET 68 offensive. Upon leaving the village defense mission and crossing over into direct offensive combat, the Special Forces had been busy in transforming the CIDG into a sophisticated light irregular infantry force to meet the emerging enemy threat on the battlefields. This transformation actually started with the execution of integrated combat operations which was tasked by MACV. By 1965 the missions assigned the 5th SFGA illustrate not only the traditional economy of force missions but the vision of future integrated operations:

"MISSIONS: Provide assistance in the establishment of bases for the conduct of border surveillance operations. Provide assistance in the establishment of bases for conducting operations against VC War Zones, Provide assistance in the establishment of bases for conducting operations to interdict VC internal movement corridors. Provide assistance in supporting such operations as directed by COMUSMACV." 30

#### CIDG INTEGRATION WITH CONVENTIONAL UNITS

The CIDG had by 1967 emerged as a two tier force. First there was the camp strike forces with the missions of surveillance, interdiction of enemy infiltration as well as

attacking enemy base areas. Missions within their capabilities that support and complement conventional forces were: blocking missions, screening force, light reconnaissance in force, search and destroy, reconnoiter secure landing zones/drop zones, and combat operations against VC units and infrastructure.<sup>31</sup> The second CIDG force was the mobile strike force (MSF or Mike Forces) and its missions were: "corps level reserve, raids, ambushes, patrols, search and seizure operations, mobile guerrilla operations in enemy territory, reinforce CIDG camps under attack, and small scale conventional operations which may include airborne operations."<sup>32</sup> These were better trained and better led forces than the camp strike forces. In the effort to be as self sufficient as possible, these Mike Force units relieved the burden of bailing out a CIDG camp under siege from the conventional American combat unit's operational load. This was another unique evolution of the CIDG. Initially the only units that could bail out the CIDG when they found the enemy were the conventional American units if available. The problem was that hunting was rather good and American units were often decisively engaged in major operations. The Mike Forces allowed the Special Forces to develop, contain or eliminate the enemy once found with its organic CIDG reaction forces. Regardless of how the battle was initiated, the CIDG found themselves integrated on a conventional battlefield working with regular American Army and Marine units. This integration of the CIDG was not always fully understood and the CIDG contributions suffered.

Why this integration failed is because the conventional unit often required capabilities beyond what irregular forces could hope to achieve. However, when used within their limitations and capabilities, the CIDG could make a powerful contribution. The 5th SFGA command report in 1965 to MACV illustrates this:

"CIDG troops are organized into 150 man light infantry companies oriented and equipped for squad through company size combat and reconnaissance patrol operations. They can be effectively used to conduct raids on VC supply bases, ambush VC routes of communication, limited search and clear operations, and serve as blocking force for larger combined operations. They lack the organic fire support, training, motivation, and inherent leadership to attack large VC troop concentrations, to assault major VC fortified positions. They cannot be expected to replace conventional units in conducting large clear and hold operations. They can be used to follow up these operations to solidify the local security situation and to conduct population and resource control activities." 33

The integration of the CIDG was marked with some painful lessons learned and relearned throughout the Viet Nam War. An example of not integrating CIDG operations with conventional operations is the disaster of Camp A Shau:

"Special Forces A Shau Camp had existed at the lower end of the valley for three years...was the only Special Forces fort left. The A Shau Valley dominated allied strategy for the duration of the Second Indochina War, but it was swept out of Special Forces existence in less than fifty tragic hours on 9 and 10 March 1966 ...defenders numbered exactly 17 Special Forces, 6 LLDB (Vietnamese Special Forces), 143 Nungs

(Chinese CIDG), 210 Vietnamese CIDG,...The garrison spent the night of 8-9 March on general alert in expectation of imminent attack...At 3:50 a.m. the camp was subjected to devastating two and a half hour mortar barrage...The North Vietnamese 95th Regiment sent a two company probe against the south wall at 4:30 a.m., which was repulsed... A Shau was beyond friendly artillery range and depended on airstrikes for support...fog prevented aircraft from spotting the camp even after daylight...Throughout the rest of the day, ammunition, supplies, and water were parachuted into the camp...the camp was subjected to another intensely accurate mortar shelling at 4:00 a.m. on 10 March...an hour later a massed NVA human wave rolled over the runway..onto the southern wall...After three hours of hand to hand combat and close in gunfights, the Special Forces soldiers and their irregulars were forced back ...Captain Blair directed aircraft to bomb and strafe the entire camp...The remainder of the camp survivors turned into the jungle to escape during the night of 10 March. The battle of A Shau had been a harrowing ordeal, and the defeat had much larger ramifications. The Marines initially wrote off the action as the fall of an indefensible Special Forces border surveillance camp, of no consequence to the larger war. The North Vietnamese had paid a heavy price for the camp but now had unchecked infiltration lanes through the A Shau corridor. They used the valley as a staging base for the attack on Hue two years later. The fall of the A Shau Special Forces Camp indeed had a major impact on the future course of the war." 34

This brutal account illustrates a classic misutilization of the CIDG forces in a Corps' area of responsibility. The CIDG had been put in harms way to conduct the border surveillance mission and the interdiction mission per the MACV strategy. The Marines who had operational responsibility for I Corps did not attempt to reinforce the camp nor pile on to engage the enemy once the enemy had come out in the open for the assault on the CIDG camp. This illustrates that although MACV wanted the CIDG to act as trip wires and deny enemy infiltration into South Viet Nam, the strategy did not enjoy unity of effort from the Marine Commander

of I Corps. The Marines to their credit expended an effort with Marine aviation to attempt to rescue the camp survivors. While some survivors were saved, far more would have made it had the Marines thoroughly understood that the CIDG could find the enemy, fix the enemy but were just too weak to destroy the enemy in sustained conventional combat such as this. Destroying the enemy is what MACV expected the Marines to do and it did not happen. The CIDG in this case were needlessly sacrificed.

There were, however, some commanders that immediately grasped the benefits of integrated operations with the CIDG. The U.S. 4th Division was one of the most successful in this integration effort and it paid off in spades as illustrated in this early operation:

"In the fall of 1966 Lt. Col. Parmley, commanding a B detachment at Pleiku, led a battalion-size task force of two local CIDG companies and one MIKE Force company into the Plei Trap woods to the west, covering the northern flank of a multibattalion sweep of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division. During the ensuing operation, Parmley's patrolling rifle units engaged scattered enemy forces in a running fight, but finally bumped into the 88th North Vietnamese Regiment, which had been preparing to attack the relatively inexperienced American division from the rear. In a series of fire fights that followed, the rapidly withdrawing CIDG force took several casualties before the more powerful 4th Division units could relieve it and take over the battle. However, the CIDG action prevented the division from being surprised and enabled it to bring the normally elusive enemy unit to battle." 35

In the CINC-PAC 1968 Report on the War in Vietnam, the Commander, MACV, indicated his positive support for the CIDG contribution on an integrated battlefield when he stated:

"border defense and surveillance was another major type of operation....based primarily on the fortified camps of the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups and their US Army Special Forces advisors. These camps performed a valuable intelligence and surveillance function. They were purposely located astride major supply and infiltration routes. Patrols operating from them inhibited enemy movement upon contact frequently brought down the wrath of our aerial firepower upon the enemy - often North Vietnamese regulars. Consequently, the enemy constantly sought to destroy or neutralize them. Once the enemy concentrated and moved into the open to strike these camps, we employed our superior mobility and firepower to reinforce the threaten camp or to counterattack and destroy the exposed enemy units."

Integrated into the General Westmoreland's conventional strategy and execution of the war since 1965, these irregular forces carried out their missions and racked up significant results that are hard to dispute, even if they were often misemployed or often tasked beyond their fragile capabilities. General Westmoreland's 1968 report documents this:

"the overall value of our Special Forces and the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups can scarcely be overstated. The intelligence they furnished on enemy infiltration and operations in remote areas was vital. With minimum strength they maintained a measure of control in vast areas that otherwise might have gone to the enemy by default. They brought some 45,000 fighting men and a proportionate population under government control or influence, all of whom might otherwise have been recruited or dominated by the enemy."



In spite of the blinding obvious which was for American commanders to exploit every resource at their disposal to defeat and destroy the enemy, the CIDG were misunderstood or misjudged. Colonel Kelly in Viet Nam Studies, U.S. Army Special Forces painfully wrote: "On the whole, U.S. commanders never really became familiar with the civilian irregulars and their capabilities." <sup>38</sup> When innovative leaders took charge, integrated operations went extremely well but when this was not the case, the U.S. Army was the loser. Perhaps it was the way we fought wars that got in our way as Colonel Simpson explained:

"The uniquely American policy of never operating outside the fan of supporting artillery caused many misunderstandings...Numerous times division commanders would tell young captains advising supporting CIDG companies: "Son, you just take your Mike Force out on my left flank and find yourself an enemy force. When you yell for help, I'll take them off your back!" Young captains tend to believe generals, so they would enthusiastically undertake their armed reconnaissance and would end up surrounded, jubilantly radioing the general, "I've got them! They are all around me!" Invariably, they would be extracted by helicopter, and nothing further would come of the Mike Forces's high-risk actions. American commanders just did not send their forces tooting off into unknown situations without artillery support, and the SF learned that over the years, to their sorrow."<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the evolution of integrating special operations forces with conventional forces was just too slow from the Special Forces point of view. Perhaps without a written doctrine being in place, this evolution was doomed due to the yearly rotation of personnel that plagued the Army's effort of

continuity and unity of effort in the Viet Nam War. No one element of the Army is to blame. Perhaps the CIDG effort and Special Forces were ahead of their time. Whatever the truth was, General Westmoreland believed in the concept and General Abrams realistically:

"perceived Special Forces merely as an economy of force arrangement, whereby pressure could be maintained against the NVA/VC at minimal cost in American lives. CIDG soldiers were cheap and cost-effective. While the price of initial issue for a CIDG soldier was about 71 percent that of a regular American soldier, his daily subsistence and pay were only 16 percent of the U.S. soldier's cost." <sup>40</sup>

The bottom line on integration is simply that we could have done better and saved American lives as well as resources to achieve a true economy of force benefit with the CIDG.

#### TET 68 - THE CIDG LITMUS TEST

Whether justified or not, the Tet 68 period is considered by historians to be a watershed event. This period gives us a snapshot of the CIDG in a mid intensity period of the war where we clearly had conventional American and North Vietnamese forces (augmented with Viet Cong support) squaring away. If there was a time in the war for which the CIDG were least suited to make a contribution it should have been during this conventional war phase.

This was not the case and serves to illustrate some hard lessons about the utility of irregular forces under Special Forces control:

"Largely, as a result of the Tet offensive, operations and results increased during the quarter as compared to the previous period. A total of 4,408 company size operations were conducted during the quarter. A total of 2492 enemy were killed as compared to 2041 killed the previous reporting period and the number captured increased from 228 to 457. Although operations and enemy casualties increased, the number of USASF killed experienced a significant decrease from 37 to 17. CIDG casualties remained approximately the same."<sup>41</sup>

Actually, the above summary indicates the CIDG had been on a roll. When the enemy offensive struck the major cities of South Viet Nam, a critical need went out for CIDG support. Off the border camps and remote operational areas and into the urban areas came the CIDG composed of ethnic sub groups that for the most part had never seen an urban area much less a city in their entire lives. What the CIDG lacked in worldly ways, they made up with infantry determination and flexibility. They met the enemy wherever the Special Forces took them and were lethal. So, in the most dynamic period of conventional conflict thus far into the war, the irregular CIDG held their own and although untrained in urban warfare, proved adaptable and successful.<sup>42</sup> In fact, considering the fact that less Special Forces advisors were killed than the year before when combat was not of the Tet 68 intensity, it is clear that the CIDG were carrying their own load of the war and were evolving again, only this time more into

refined and better trained/experienced infantry. This ramp up is reflected in these CIDG statistics from the post Tet 68 period of Sep 1969-June 1970:

ENEMY KILLED	ENEMY CAPTURED	ENEMY WEAPONS	ENEMY CACHED WEAPONS	ENEMY TO CIDG KILL RATIO
4049	350	1654	1876	8.8:1 43

Considering the fact that the VC were all but destroyed by Tet 68, these figures lend themselves to validating a 8.8 enemy (more North Vietnamese Army personnel than Viet Cong) soldiers killed in action for every one CIDG striker. Add to this the fact that out of each CIDG camp, 66% were on operations on continuous basis. What the American and Vietnamese Special Forces had ultimately created was an efficient paramilitary force that fielded a large percentage of line strength devoted to sustained combat operations. This was the shape of the CIDG at the close out of the program in June of 1970 as it converted from irregulars into the structure of the South Vietnamese Army.<sup>44</sup> Doubters may state that the war was over after Tet 68 and the above statistics are a flawed snapshot of the CIDG in the best of times, best as far as CIDG levels of training and best as far as the enemy being non aggressive. First, consider the CIDG posture on the eve of Tet 68. By 17 Dec 1968 the CIDG was organized and ready with 43,000 strikers, 272 camp strike forces, 43 Mobile Strike Forces, and 126 reconnaissance platoons. This force was based in 76 remote camps throughout all four corps of Viet

Nam.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, take a closer look at the following outline of CIDG accomplishments in comparison with a conventional first rate US Army Division during Tet 68 and both in the same tactical area - III Corps . First lets look at the US 1st Infantry Division:

	FEB	MAR	APR	TOTAL
US KILLED	113	32	78	234
US WOUNDED	567	360	486	1413
ENEMY KILLED	1506	497	606	2609
ENEMY WOUNDED	0	0	0	0
ENEMY POW	53	47	38	138 <sup>46</sup>

The above statistics from the 1st Infantry Division using hard count items to determine loss, (killed, wounded, or captured) reflect a loss ratio of 1647 US to 2747 enemy. This is less than a 1 US to 2 Enemy ratio for the entire quarter of the massive Tet 68 Offensive. For the month of February, the actual Tet period, the ratio is 680 US to 1559 Enemy which equates to almost a 1 US to 2.5 Enemy.<sup>47</sup> The point here is that Tet 68 was mid intensity conflict for the 1st Infantry Division along with its organic fires, command/control systems and sophisticated combat support, combat service support assets.

Now look at the CIDG Forces in the same operational area for the same month of Tet 68:

CIDG KILLED	31	ENEMY KILLED	145
CIDG WOUNDED	153	ENEMY WOUNDED	56
CIDG MISSING	5	ENEMY CAPTURED	17
USSF KILLED	0	ENEMY LOSS	218
USSF WOUNDED	9		
USSF MISSING	0		
VN SF KILLED	0		
VN SF WOUNDED	3		
VN SF MISSING	0		
TOTAL LOST	210		

These statistics account for 210 CIDG force against 218 enemy lost.<sup>48</sup> This almost 1 CIDG to 1 enemy ratio includes the American and Vietnamese Special Forces who fought along side the CIDG and were friendly losses as well. The harsh reality is that in this example, the raggedy, irregular CIDG force had a 1:1 ratio and the hard core conventional American infantry had a 1:2.5 ratio. Although the CIDG comes out 1 for 1, it illustrates that by the litmus test of Tet 68, the CIDG fought every bit as good as the North Vietnamese/VC forces in one of the hottest areas of that enemy offensive. If consideration is given to the reality that we will never know the true enemy losses, the CIDG probably fared a little better than 1 for 1 and the same for the

1st Infantry Division's 1:2.5 effectiveness as well.

Laying another template onto this example would serve to determine just what return did the US Army get for the investment? The 5th Special Forces Group had a force multiplier mission in the CIDG concept. In short, for small investments of Special Forces, we could create combat formations of indigenous forces to fight the war. The bottom line is that we lost 9 American Special Forces wounded against an enemy loss of 218. Cruel as it may seem, that is a better than 1 US to 24 Enemy loss ratio by exploiting the CIDG. Additionally the 1st Infantry Division had a 1:2.5 ratio and did it with tremendous assets and firepower. The 5th Special Forces Group really got a 1:24 using the unsophisticated strikers of the CIDG and did this in the most volatile period of the war. In fact, across all of Viet Nam for the period of 1967 and the period through April of 1968, the Special Forces chalked up a ratio of 1:78 enemy and 1:83 enemy respectively utilizing the CIDG resources.<sup>49</sup> As stated before, by June of 1970 the CIDG had reached a 1 to 8.8 kill ratio over the enemy. This 8:8 is really impressive and clearly illustrates the ramp up of the CIDG effectiveness. It also indicates the final evolution of the CIDG from paramilitary to hard core professional infantry. The CIDG had arrived. Few examples of economy of force exist better than the Special Forces use of the CIDG in the Viet Nam War. Detractors from this position would point out that one of the least respected legacies of the Viet Nam War was the body count methodology. Two points need to be

made. First, the American Army was in a war of attrition. This strategy was consistent throughout the war and enemy kill ratios were the primary method of relating tactical success. It still remains a method of comparison available to document positive and negative trends on the battlefield for historians. Secondly, the statistics related on Tet 68 were documented before the heyday of the "Kill VC Syndrome" that became a rampant measure of evaluation from late 1968 onwards.<sup>50</sup> Are CIDG statistics realistic and credible? Overwhelmingly, yes. In the analysis of this CIDG program, not once was a claim made to the extravagant as often done by conventional US Army units. Never was a 1:158 enemy body count claimed like the US 9th Division in 1969.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, the last ratio of one CIDG to 8 enemy was at the close of the program and what must be remembered is that two years later, the regular North Vietnamese conventional invasion of 1972 was repulsed. The CIDG as well as the Vietnamization of the war did accomplish that success. Even the most skeptical reader can recognize the positive trend of improved combat effectiveness as a fact by 1970. A parting shot on the use of body counts demands stating the obvious. No matter how abhorrent the kill ratio methodology is to American morals of the 1990's, the truth is the American Army did win every major battle of the war and that does not occur without causing immense casualties to the opponent. In spite of inflation of body count figures, the research on the CIDG program does not validate any mistrust of the statistics used in this study.



## GROUND TRUTH I

The bitter outcome of the Viet Nam War has overshadowed many positive accomplishments of the United States Army in that war. One of the most universal travesties of justice and fact is the role of the United States Army Special Forces and the CIDG. A myth during the war and the decades after was that the Special Forces/CIDG fought its own war and did not contribute to the Army's efforts. The roots of this myth probably stem from the initial CIA to Special Forces relationship and went down hill from there. Research shows this to have been an Army internal problem:

"As early as 1965 Col. Charles E. Spragins, the deputy group commander, noted that many of the more conventional American officers viewed the semiautonomous organization with suspicion and even "distrust." With its own chain of command, funding, and supply system, it may have appeared too independent and too steeped in "unconventional warfare" to be part of the Army "team." The varied and often conflicting roles and missions of the Special Forces made the problem worse. Spragins felt that Army field advisers envied the greater power and leverage that Special Forces officers enjoyed over their counterparts, their almost direct control of the CIDG effort, and their ability to call on their own combat reserve forces when necessary. Col Francis J. Kelly, who commanded the 5th Special Forces Group in 1966 and 1967, was "continually conscious of mistrust and suspicion on the part of many senior field grade U.S. military men" toward his command. ....The feelings of Army Chief of Staff Harold K. Johnson typified some of the attitudes that worried Kelly....General Johnson...was confused and unhappy with the activities of the Special Forces. .. he felt that U.S. Special Forces members "viewed themselves as something separate and distinct from the rest of the military effort," ... For those who shared Johnson's judgements, it was easy to write off the CIDG program

and, indeed, the entire American advisory effort as almost a waste of time and money. Trained in conventional methods of warfare, many American commanders looked down on such unconventional endeavors and regarded the results of U.S. ground operations as the principal gauge for measuring progress in the war." <sup>52</sup>

Tragically, this myth is further enhanced by the multitude of classified MACV missions the Special Forces performed which have not become common knowledge yet. This myth has no factual basis. First of all, although the initial efforts of the Special Forces were involved in the CIA programs of the war, the Special Forces was pulled back under MACV in 1964 to support the conventional war of attrition. Hindsight may now illustrate that this left the war for the villages ill organized as the primary United States Army counterinsurgency force went to fight the conventional battles in the border and remote areas of the countryside. Not until late 1967 was a population oriented, well organized replacement strategy for William Colby's Citizen Irregular Defense Force concept initiated under the CORDS program under Robert Komer. <sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the Special Forces never chose their mission. First the Army directed it support the CIA programs, then the Army directed it support the MACV efforts. The US Army transition of the CIDG into the mainstream conventional war of attrition, the least desirable utilization for irregular paramilitary forces, still proved to be successful under the execution authority of the Special Forces who were the only asset competent to do this mission. Furthermore, from 1964 on, the Special Forces had been tasked to conduct the CIDG

program under the MACV Combined Campaign Plan which specified the exact role to be performed in support to the overall war effort. Specifically, the 1967 MACV Combined Campaign Plan CIDG Annex "provided for two major elements: outlining a strategy for CIDG camps country-wide, and providing for the phase-out of the U.S. Special Forces and their withdrawal from Vietnam by 1971." <sup>54</sup> On this direction, the goal of working themselves out of a job was initiated by the Special Forces. In reality this was Vietnamization before the Nixon mandate for Vietnamization. So even before it became national policy, the Special Forces were Vietnamizing the CIDG program and ended their involvement by 1970, one year ahead of schedule as directed by the 1967 MACV Combined Campaign Plan. Col Shackleton's summary best makes the point:

"The concept of Vietnamization, which became the focal point for all U.S. strategy in Vietnam in 1969, might well have been conceived from the CIDG program. From the outset, the CIDG program was designed to help the Vietnamese win their war." <sup>55</sup>

Secondly, the mission of border surveillance put the CIDG into the role of trip wire for enemy infiltration. Once the CIDG found the enemy, the conventional US Army was brought into the battle. Not only was this a clear supporting role to the overall strategy of attrition but it clearly allowed US Army combat power to be released from border surveillance and reserved for lethal combat application. The CIDG were a positive economy of force operation that spanned all four corps areas of South Viet Nam.

Lastly, wherever the CIDG were employed, the Special Forces made them cost effective. In the earlier CIA period, the Boun Enao example is but one illustration of the tremendous success of the counter insurgency potential of the CIDG under the Special Forces exploitation. In the offensive period of employment into the war of attrition, the CIDG were once again exploited in the border surveillance role and denial of remote areas to the enemy. Historically, the value of the program is in it's example of how to correctly fight an insurgent war as well as how to support the conventional war effort using Special Forces in a force multiplication role:

"With even the increase in the CIDG effort of from six U.S. Special Forces soldiers in 1962 to nearly 600 at the peak of the CIDG effort in 1969, no one could interpret this as an escalation on the part of the US. This simply portrayed the growth and significance of the "peasant army" concept as it reached a total force of over 70,000 active, armed peasants....In January 1970, 44 CIDG strike force battalions completed conversion, in place, to ARVN Ranger battalions. The cycle was completed and the "peasant army" was assimilated into the governments armed force structure.

It must be mentioned that the initial cost of equipping a peasant soldier was less than \$10; and in terms of sustaining him in the field, about \$1 per day. This changed dramatically in 1965 when the CIDG mission was changed to that of the offensive...the cost rose to almost \$200 per man for equipment (\$145 for the M16 rifle alone) and to nearly \$6 per day to keep him in the field. This was still cheap when compared to the nearly \$400 per man it took to equip the Army of Viet Nam (ARVN) and U.S. soldier; and the \$12 and \$30 respectively it cost to sustain them in the field. Equally important, is that less than 400 Americans died as a result of combat action during the eight years the CIDG program was in being. By body count, the ratio of indigenous CIDG battlefield losses to that of the enemy was about 1:15. The reputation of the CIDG forces as

combat skilled rests on the lips of every US and Vietnamese unit who have conducted operations with them. They strongly attest to the battlefield skills and valor of the CIDG forces." <sup>56</sup>

Therefore, the United States Army and MACV invested their Special Forces assets deliberately to achieve an outstanding of economy of force operation in a classical low intensity conflict scenario involving insurgency and conventional enemy forces. At low costs in resources, the Special Forces in their force multiplier role, built an irregular army that was 99 percent riflemen and was fully integrated into the campaign strategy of the war.<sup>57</sup> In fact, the combat power of the CIDG is positively significant in sheer nondisputable facts. Historian Col Harry Summers, even admitted: "At its height the CIDG program mustered the equivalent of four infantry divisions." <sup>58</sup> When compared to the United States Marine Corps, the CIDG outmatched them in infantry divisional force equivalents fielded in the Viet Nam War. Therefore, at the mere investment of one Special Forces Group, the return on this investment was a 4 divisional equivalent combat force, purely tooth, without tail and terribly cost effective. Without a doubt, the myth of Special Forces doing its own unilateral operations is just that, an unfounded myth and the contributions of the Special Forces' CIDG program are historical fact.

Lastly, in a recently discovered letter, deeply filed in the United States Army Military History Institute, the Deputy Commander of MACV stated the following in late 1970:

"The mission of the CIDG program under 5th SFGA leadership has been accomplished, and the program is to be turned over to Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) in accordance with Presidential policy. The magnitude of the achievements that officers and men of the 5th SFGA have compiled in the development of an aggressive, offensive minded fighting force; in population and resources control; in the interdiction of enemy forces and supplies, and area security will be recorded by historians of the Vietnam war as truly significant."<sup>59</sup>

#### GROUND TRUTH II

Myths such as this misunderstanding concerning the Special Forces and the CIDG do not die easily unless backed by fact and are best killed by examples in the present day. We have that in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Once again, it is the role of the 5th Special Forces Group, Airborne (5th SFGA) to take up the battle with indigenous forces and integrate their combat power into the campaign plan of the theater commander. This time, Special Forces as well as the United States Army faced not the low intensity conflict scenario as was Viet Nam, but mid to high intensity conflict on a very sophisticated battlefield. For the Army, it faced armored warfare and chemical warfare for the first time since World War II as well as the challenges of the desert environment. The question now is what possible contribution could Special Forces play in such a conflict?

The shortform answer to that question is easy if you recall the CIDG. At the close of the Viet Nam War, the United States Army continued to update its doctrine for Special Forces. The Army recognized three forces: Light, Heavy and Special Operations Forces as the way the Army will fight future wars. However, when Desert Shield was first initiated, the Army was not ready to address coalition warfare and this was a national vulnerability. Furthermore, maintaining the coalition of Arab nations in the Gulf War was one of our centers of gravity. This was vital to United States' interests to say the least.

Faced with the dynamics of the coalition problem, the Army looked to the 5th SFGA for the solution. The 5th SFGA was ready, it was force listed to USCENTCOM, had language and regional orientation as well as current, first hand experience on the ground. It had developed a combined arms training capability. It had successfully trained at the National Training Center as well as at the Joint Training Center. It understood how to integrate its operations with the Light and Heavy force mix of the Army and obtain unity of effort. It understood how to train indigenous forces in SHOOT, MOVE, COMMUNICATE, and SUSTAIN on the modern battlefield. It had taken the lessons learned from the CIDG program, refined them and were once again ready to take on the economy of force and force multiplier roles in support of the CINC's campaign plan. This time, it would be a multiplier of force potential far beyond the 4 divisional impact of the CIDG.

How big was the mission of the 5th SFGA? To get a true perspective, consider that the United States fielded two corps into the Persian Gulf War. Our United Nations coalition partners fielded for the CINC a two plus corps equivalent of ground forces.<sup>60</sup> The 5th SFGA was tasked with selected training of coalition forces to develop the capability of these corps to effectively coordinate and to effectively contribute its combat power on a modern mid to high intensity battlefield. The 5th SFGA performed this mission with an investment of 54 Special Forces A Detachments (12 personnel each). The 5th SFGA therefore devoted the majority of its resources to the integration of the two plus coalition corps level force into the combat power of the CINC.<sup>61</sup> This is not the total Army Special Forces contribution. In addition to the above, the 5th SFGA had teams devoted to Special Reconnaissance and Direct Action missions in support of USCENTCOM. The total contributions made by the 5th SFGA were joint, combined, multi-national/coalition as well as an integral part of the US Army Heavy, Light, SOF forces.<sup>62</sup> These contributions were combined arms as well. It was rarely known, until Desert Shield, that the 5th SFGA had one detachment fully qualified as tankers. Incredibly, SFODA 561 trained and qualified at Fort Knox as crewmen and tank commanders in the M60A3 and the M1 main battle tanks. They were also trained in Soviet armor. In Desert Shield, SFODA 561 transitioned one Saudi armored battalion to the M60A3. The armor battalion was trained in maintenance, boresighting, tank gunnery, crew drills, movement techniques,



defensive and offensive operations (day, night, stationary, moving)." <sup>63</sup> This example of the depth of Special Forces combined arms training was the bonus dividend much needed when the coalition had to be formed into an effective fighting force in record time. As it had done with the CIDG, the 5SFGA was again in the force multiplier role.

In the Desert Shield phase of the Gulf War, the after action report of USCENTCOM evaluated the contribution as follows:

"Central Command recognized the need to assess the capabilities and limitations of the forces being committed to the Multi-national effort in the gulf. Special Forces were attached to coalitions forces at division, brigade and battalion level to assess levels of readiness, to provide necessary training, and provide critical communications ...by January, they had become a vital link in the theater battle integration process. Without them, it would have been very difficult for coalition forces to receive US fire support, or to coordinate tactical operations with U.S. and other allied forces....additionally, our teams provided the theater essential information to ensure effective operational control " <sup>64</sup>

In respect to the tasks involved and the urgency of time limitations, the scope of this Army SOF coalition involvement bears further illustration. In Desert Shield the staggering magnitude of 5th SFGA's responsibility and effort broke down as follows:

1st Bn, 5SFGA :      3 Saudi Mechanized Infantry Brigades  
                         1 Bahrain Infantry Company  
                         1 United Arab Emirate Infantry Bn

1 Oman Infantry Bn

1 Kutar Mechanized Infantry Bn

2nd Bn, 5SFGA :    1 Egyptian Ranger Regiment  
                     1 Egyptian Mechanized Infantry Division  
                     1 Egyptian Armor Division  
                     1 Egyptian Corps Headquarters  
                     1 Syrian Armor Division

3rd Bn, 5SFGA :    1 Saudi Armor Brigade  
                     3 Kuwaiti Mechanized Infantry Brigades  
                     1 Saudi Mechanized Infantry Brigade    65

Of extraordinary note is that the 3rd Battalion 5th SFGA had the task of reconstitution of the Kuwaiti Army which is an impressive challenge beyond the normal range of missions usually associated with a foreign internal defense mission scenario.<sup>66</sup> In fact, this Special Forces battalion literally built 6 Kuwaiti brigades from a zero base line. They did this in less than 6 months and took this force to combat later. Truly an awesome feat unparalleled in recent history.<sup>67</sup> In addition to these tasks, the 5SFGA had formed Special Operations coordination detachments to provide communications, planning and coordination of operations with the xviii Airborne Corps, vii Corps, 1st Marine Division, 2nd Marine Division, 6th French Armored Division, and

the 1st United Kingdom Armored Division throughout the duration of Desert Shield and Desert Storm.<sup>68</sup>

The investment of the Army and of the US Central Command in the Special Forces paid large dividends during the Desert Storm operation. Unlike the Viet Nam experience, the force readiness contribution made by Special Forces equated to a clear majority of the CINC's land combat forces. The Special Forces maintained command, control and communications elements to 102 maneuver battalion, brigade, division and corps Pan-Arab units. This equated to a two plus Corps force level. It was the Special Forces who became the "glue" that held these corps together and provided the CINC with coalition force locations, activities, intentions and capabilities by battlefield operation systems. It was the Special Forces that provided the expertise for close air support, coordination of fires and coordination for maneuver of these coalition corps. It was the Special Forces that maintained such strict and timely coordination of these corps that not a single incident of fratricide occurred in Desert Storm involving these units.<sup>69</sup> This coordination effort reflected the thoroughness of the train up that Special Forces accomplished with these coalition forces during Desert Shield. Other examples of this are the night passage of lines through the US 1st Cavalry Division by the Syrian Armored Division with their Special Forces coordination support during Desert Storm and the liberation of Kuwait City by coalition forces with their ever present Special Forces counterparts.<sup>70</sup>

Just like in Viet Nam, there were special reconnaissance and direct action missions in support of the theater commander and conventional US Army corps commanders by the 5th SFGA. As in Viet Nam, these missions were not the majority of the Special Forces effort. Like Viet Nam, the majority of effort was with indigenous forces, they were the modern day coalition force that the 5th SFGA assisted the CINC to synchronize and integrate with the conventional U.S. Corps to support the ground campaign plan. Had the outcome of the Viet Nam War been different, the final verdict for the Special Forces and the CIDG program would have rang as true as what was written at the close of the Gulf War. Two decades after Viet Nam, Special Forces finally got credit and the myth of unilateral operations was finally closed forever when CINCENT: "characterized the contribution of Special Operations Forces to the coalition warfare effort as one of the most vital missions they performed during the war." <sup>71</sup> Historically, the most important step in verification of the current Army Heavy, Light, SOF, force mix/doctrine was when USCENTCOM testified to the U S Congress the following conclusions:

SOF support to coalition warfare was a key factor to success

SOF can operate across the breath and depth of the modern battlefield.

SOF operating with conventional forces maximizes force capability

SOF provides the theater commander options otherwise not available

These conclusions could have and should have been documented and recognized by our military two decades ago concerning the 5th SFGA and its successful execution of the CIDG program as well as its other roles in support of MACV strategy. General Schwartzkopf corrected that when he set the record straight after the Gulf War. No longer will the CIDG be remembered as "gypsies of the battlefield." Twenty years later, they are exactly what the Special Forces made them, "the first successful coalition warfare operation of the cold war era." Just as important as setting history straight, General Schwartzkopf set into concrete the doctrine that future ground campaign plans must integrate Heavy, Light, and SOF forces on the modern battlefield.

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